



Help Your Child
Succeed in Preschool
and Kindergarten

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Introduction

Sending your child off to school for the first time is an exciting milestone. It marks the end of the baby and toddler years and the opening of a wider world with new friends, new experiences and new ways of learning.

This handbook will help you give your child the best possible start. It contains tips for preparing your child for preschool and kindergarten, creating a connection between home and school, and staying involved in their education.



1. Support Learning and Development at Home

Your child has been learning since the day they were born. Much of it happens naturally but there are many ways to encourage your child's natural curiosity and instill in them a love of learning. Here are some ways to build a strong foundation for the preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

Reading and Language

- Read to your child every day.
- Point to pictures in the book and ask your child what is happening.
- Make up new stories to go with the pictures.
- If your child is familiar with the book, ask them to finish sentences for you.
- Point to the words as you read to help your child connect the printed word with the way it sounds.

Reading and Language Games

Rhyme Time

Take turns with your child thinking up words that rhyme. For example, you say "hat," and your child says "bat."

Find the Letter

Choose a letter and see how many places that letter appears in your home or while you're out. Look for the letter on boxes, labels and signs.

Make up a Story

Begin a story with a single sentence, then take turns adding to it. You might start with "Once upon a time, a cat knocked on my door." Your child might add, "I answered the door and said, 'Hello. What is your name?'" and so on.

Math and Science

- Have your child help measure ingredients while you are cooking or baking.
- Talk about what happens to food or liquid when it heats up and when ingredients are mixed together.
- Have your child help sort dirty laundry by whites and colors. When folding clean laundry, ask your child to sort items by type of clothing or who they belong to.
- In the grocery store, count the items in your cart. Notice different shapes and sizes of products.

Math and Science Games

Add and Subtract

Count out household items, blocks or other small toys. Take some away and ask how many are left. Add some and ask how many now.

Match the Numbers

Write down numbers 1-10 on pieces of paper or use chalk to write numbers on the sidewalk. Have your child count out the correct number of pennies, pebbles or other objects to place on the numbers.

The Long and Short of It

Cut a ribbon in three to five pieces of different lengths. Have your child lay them side by side. Compare their lengths. Line them up, longest to shortest.

Treasure Hunt

Hide objects in the house and have your child find them by following your directions.

Field Trips

The wider world offers many opportunities to learn and socialize. Here are some suggestions for what to do, see, and learn with your child:

- **Take your child to the library.** Check whether your public library has special activities for younger children, such as story times, crafts and performances.
- **Visit playgrounds.** If possible, go to different playgrounds so your child can try out a variety of play structures and equipment.
- **Take nature walks.** Look for birds and other wildlife. Identify leaves and the different colors you see along your walk. Collect objects, like sticks, acorns and rocks. Sort them into different categories at home.
- **Visit museums, the zoo, and other interesting and enriching places.** Keep visits short enough that your child doesn't lose interest or tire out.



2. Prepare Your Child for Preschool

Your child will continue to develop learning skills in preschool. These skills include:

- **Spatial awareness:** Understanding the distance between yourself and other objects; understanding concepts such as “over,” “under,” “in” and “out”
- **Language:** Expressing yourself and understanding others using words and non-verbal communication
- **Social:** Getting along with others
- **Fine motor:** Handling small objects, such as a coloring with a crayon or tying a shoe
- **Gross motor:** Using large muscle groups for physical activity such as running, jumping and climbing

The chart below lists activities you can do at home to build the skills your child will need in preschool.

Skill-building Activities for Preschoolers					
Activity	Spatial Awareness	Language	Social	Fine Motor	Gross Motor
Painting (fingers or brushes)				😊	
Play dough				😊	
Using safety scissors				😊	
Stringing beads into patterns	😊			😊	
Puzzles	😊			😊	
Blocks				😊	
Board games	😊	😊	😊	😊	
Playing catch or kicking a ball to one another	😊		😊		😊
Dancing to music	😊				😊
Hopscotch	😊		😊		😊
Singing songs		😊			
Playing make-believe, such as house, school or restaurant	😊	😊	😊		

Before the First Day of Preschool

Children tend to handle new situations better when they know what to expect. Because very young children have difficulty with the concept of time, wait until two or three weeks before school starts to start talking about it. Introduce the idea of preschool casually in conversation.

Talk about preschool

- Talk with your child about what will happen in preschool.
- Keep your tone upbeat and enthusiastic, but don't overdo it. Treat going to preschool as an exciting, but natural next step in your child's life.
- Your child may have real concerns about preschool, such as whether the teacher will be nice or what will happen if they get hungry. Answer all of your child's questions with patience and reassurance.

Visit the preschool

- Introduce your child to the teacher and other staff members.
- Explore the classroom together.
- Show your child how to find the bathroom and where to hang their coat.

Play school

Take turns with your child playing the parent, the student and the teacher. Playing school might include:

- Saying goodbye to Mommy or Daddy
- Having circle time and sitting "crisscross applesauce"
- Singing songs
- Snack time
- Story time
- Nap time
- Cleanup and time to go home

Other ways to prepare

- Read books about preschool.
- Arrange playdates with other children who will be attending your child's preschool. That way when school starts, your child will already have friends.
- Let your child pick out their backpack and outfit for the first day of school. If they'll be bringing lunch, let them help pack it the night before.

Help your child do things on their own

- Let your child practice unzipping their coat and hanging it on a hook, just like they will do in preschool.
- Have your child fasten their own shoes and brush their own hair.
- Have a picnic together so your child can learn to open their lunchbox and unwrap their food.

Getting Along With Others

If your child hasn't spent a lot of time with other children, they may need some practice learning to take turns, sharing and socializing.

- Bring your child to library story times and other activities for very young children.
- Enroll your child in an activity such as art, tumbling or music. You might find one through your local YMCA or community use program.
- Arrange regular playdates with other children your child's age.



3. The First Day and Beyond

Some children settle right in to the new routine of going to preschool; for others, it might take longer.

Start Off Right

- Let your child choose what to wear on the first day of school. Make it easier by selecting two or three outfits to choose from.
- Be upbeat. Your child will become upset if they see that you're sad or worried about the drop-off.
- Stay until your child is settled, but don't stay too long. As soon as your child seems comfortable, say goodbye. If your child becomes clingy or tearful, ask a staff member to stay with them so they'll have another caring adult to turn to for support.
- Don't turn back, even if you hear your child crying. Returning will only make it harder for them to adapt. Later, you can contact the teacher to make sure your child settled in after you left.

Monitor Your Child's Adjustment

Be aware of signs that your child is nervous or unhappy. They may:

- Become clingy
- Become withdrawn
- Act aggressively
- Ask for your help getting dressed or fed even though they can do these things themselves
- Wet the bed or have potty accidents in the daytime

Your child may need some extra support and patience from you during this time.

- Let them know that it's okay to be scared or worried.
- Talk about a time when you tried something new and what it felt like.
- Let them pick out a comfort object to bring to school, such as a stuffed animal or a photograph of you.

Strengthen the Home-school Connection

Your child will be excited to share their experiences with you.

- When they come home with artwork or worksheets, talk about them together.
- Hang artwork in a visible place at home, such as on the refrigerator.
- Ask your child to teach you songs or rhymes that they learned in preschool.

Establishing a good relationship with your child's teacher will make it easier to monitor their progress.

- Make sure you have the teacher's contact information
- Find out what activities your child is learning in class so you can practice them at home.
- If possible, attend activities that are open to parents, such as class parties and presentations.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences.

4. Prepare Your Child for Kindergarten

Going to kindergarten is an important milestone in your child’s life. They may be excited about “growing up” and going to school with the bigger kids. But they also may feel anxious about starting school.

Is Your Child Ready?

Children develop at their own rate. Some may be reading by the time they enter kindergarten, while others are still learning the alphabet. These differences tend to even out over time as children grow. However, if you have concerns about your child’s development, contact your school district for a special needs evaluation.

Use the chart as a general guideline to help you determine whether your child is ready for kindergarten.

Speech and Listening Skills	Yes	No
Follows directions containing two or more steps		
Speaks in complete sentences		
Grasps words that indicate position, direction, or size, such as “top,” “bottom,” “big,” “little,” “first” and “last”		
Learning Readiness		
Matches and categorizes objects		
Completes patterns		
Completes simple puzzles of up to four pieces		
Is able to name at least five colors		
Reading and writing readiness		
Recognizes own name in writing		
Identifies letters in own name		
Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet		
Math readiness		
Counts up to five objects in a group		
Counts from one to 10		
Names at least three shapes		
Social		
Knows first and last names		
Knows own age		
Interacts with other children		
Physical		
Hops, jumps, runs		
Uses pencils, crayons, and child scissors		
Copies straight lines, circles and other simple shapes		

Talk About Kindergarten

Be upbeat about going to kindergarten. If your child went to preschool or daycare, talk with them about the ways kindergarten will be similar and how it will be different.

- They may get to ride a school bus to school like the big kids.
- Your child may get to know adults other than their classroom teacher, such as the gym teacher, lunchroom staff, the school principal and others.

The Summer Before

- Attend any events the school has for incoming kindergartners. Some schools hold an orientation that may include a ride on the school bus and a visit to the classroom.
- Visit the school with your child. Find the restrooms, look at the lunchroom, play on the playground.
- Arrange several get-togethers at a local playground with your child's classmates. You may be able to get a class list with contact information from the school.



5. Getting Involved in Your Child's Education

Studies show that children whose parents are involved in their education tend to do better in school than those whose parents take a hands-off approach. Your involvement keeps you informed and signals to your child that education is important.

Establish a Relationship With Your Child's Teacher

- Introduce yourself to the teacher at the beginning of the year and find out how they prefer to be contacted.
- Keep the teacher informed of any changes at home that may affect your child, such as a new baby or a parent's deployment.
- Attend the school open house and parent-teacher conferences.

Volunteer

- If you can't be the room parent because work or other obligations keep you busy during the day, ask your child's teacher for other ways to help. You may be able to coordinate class parties or prepare materials for classroom activities in the evenings when you're home, for example.
- Chaperone a class field trip.
- Be a special guest in the classroom: talk about your work, your culture, etc.

Be Engaged

- Join the school's parent-teacher organization and attend its meetings. You'll meet other parents and learn about your child's school.
- Attend school events and assemblies.
- Get to know other parents and exchange contact information.

Talk With Your Child About School

Here are some conversation starters:

- What was your favorite thing you did today?
- Tell me one thing you learned.
- Who did you sit next to at lunch?

When your child is excited about a lesson from school, explore the topic together. Search the internet, borrow books from the library, visit museums and find other ways to indulge your child's interests. Your kindergartner's formal school career has begun, but learning extends beyond the classroom.

Resources

Great Schools
www.greatschools.org

Zero to Three
www.zerotothree.org



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